Slide 1

A Maine Volunteer Service Symposium
Together by Design: Lessons from Canada's
Voluntary Sector Initiative

Voluntary Sector Initiative
From the voluntary sector perspective

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Underpinnings of Voluntary Sector Initiative

- Mid 1990's- Weakening of relationship between government and the voluntary sector
- Sector: Increased demands for services, reduced capacity and limited success getting the attention of governments about changes in the welfare state restructuring
- Government: deficit cutting / budgetary cutbacks and constraints

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Climate
….Public sector restructuring

- Emerging transition from a paradigm of government departments unilaterally setting policy and contracting services to new approaches of trying to work more collaboratively and horizontally within government and with voluntary sector partners

  - Source Susan Phillips

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Process of relationship reform

- Sector decided to take measures to promote its accountability and regain trust – mid '90's
- No structure existed to bring focus to broad issues affecting the sector as a whole
- Voluntary Sector Roundtable Established
  - 14 nationals came together in loose coalition
  - Panel on Accountability and Governance in the Voluntary Sector
  - consulation with sector
  - Issued report in 1998
- Election Red Book in 1998 made gentle overtures

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First Joint Undertaking

- Launch of initial collaborative approach 1999
- Brought together 19 sector leaders from across the country and 19 seniors government representatives at Assistant Deputy Minister level
  - Three **joint** tables
    - Relationship, capacity, regulatory tables
  - Innovative feature: each table with equal government and sector membership and jointly co-chaired by sector and government representatives
  - Issued report WORKING TOGETHER August 1999

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Complexities

- Little experience from other places on how to structure relationships
- This was a unique experiment
  - Looked at and learned from UK's experience with Compact
  - But approach was somewhat different

  …Relationships between state and voluntary sector are complex…

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Voluntary Sector Initiative (VSI)

- It is a federal government initiative
- Its relationship is around issues under federal policy jurisdiction
- Federal departments have regional reach
  - But not evenly spread across the country
- It has no bearing on provincial governments

VSI mandate

- Broad mandate to develop a framework agreement, to recommend regulatory and institutional reform and to develop programs for capacity building
- Effort to have genuine partnership through another series of joint tables

…About products and process and scale…

VSI Task Areas

- 7 working tables
- Topic areas
  - Capacity
  - Awareness
  - Improving access to benefits of technology
  - New knowledge and research
  - Promoting volunteerism
  - Improving ability to engage in policy development
  - Framework for relationship - Accord and Codes

VSI 2000 – 2002
Voluntary sector representation

- Lead national groups
- No sector wide method to select representatives from the sector
- Plus others selected through nominations by independent committee
  - on basis of wide experience and links
- Joint Steering Committee
- Voluntary Senior Sector Group to match government secretariat

Shift in approach and makeup

- No sector significant consultation about Voluntary Sector Forum new structure (2005)
  - Decision primarily made by existing groups
- Before some organizations had automatic seats but this was balanced by individuals representing particular areas
- Now focus has been returned more to national organizations
- Acknowledgement of need for regional representation and grassroots input

Five years later

- VSI as currently structured within government and between government & sector in wind down phase
- New approaches being framed
- Focus on "social economy" emerging
- Canadian Federation of Voluntary Sector Networks
  - Bringing together pan Canadian networks
  - New model for working together collectively
- Newly restructured Voluntary Sector Forum
  - coordinating forum /functional approach rather than representative
- Initiatives being negotiated with government
  - for policy dialogue
  - to support for Forum and Federation
  - to build sector portal: VoluntaryGateway.ca
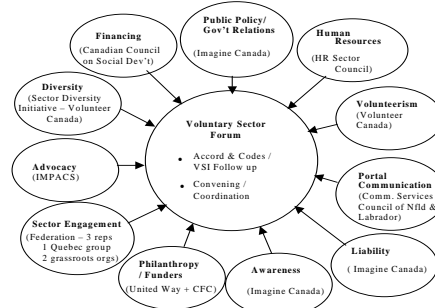
Voluntary Sector Forum 2002-2005

- At end of first two years joint table process concluded in 2002
- Voluntary Sector Forum established for 3 years – only sector representatives
  - ☐ National organizations assume positions
  - ☐ Again selection through external committee
- Mandate
  - ☐ To see through the work commenced in first two years
  - ☐ To take on other key concerns e.g. liability
  - ☐ To determine a process for sector representation

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New VSF Functional Model

Source: VSF 2005

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What were VSI Challenges?

- Accord and Codes not legally binding
  - ☐ Not an articulation of rights
- Reliant on endorsement of sector
  - ☐ Who represents the sector
  - ☐ No process for testing that endorsement
  - ☐ Representatives with credibility not necessarily authority
  - ☐ Need people well positioned to try to change cultures and practices

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Remaining Challenges - Government and Sector

- Potential for uneven application of Accord and Codes
- Need champions to promote use of Accord and Codes and the themes and issues underlying them
- Those who have been exposed are allies
- Need more training and knowledge building
- Will require "non partisan" government wide buy in to "enshrine" concepts

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Challenges for Sector

- Need for strong voices
- Concern about central control
- Risk of self selected groups being perceived as representative of sector
- Tensions amongst central groups and regional organizations
- Challenge of integrating diversity, rural and remote
- Government has upper hand, resources, final control
  - ☐ Growing tendency to micro manage
  - ☐ Excessive paper work, accountability
  - ☐ Reductions in funding for "core" activities

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Challenges for Government

- Federal departments have regional reach
  - ☐ But not evenly spread
- Potential for uneven take up
- Tensions amongst central and regional division of departments
- Finding ways to give up "command and control"
  - ☐ Appropriate results based management
  - ☐ Streamlining paper work, accountability
  - ☐ Dealing with funding issues

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Effects on sector

- Brought more groups into the loop in a general way
- Emerging sense of the sector as a whole
- Strengthened understanding of the sector
- Risk of investing power in a few
- Evidence sector does not want single voice
- Emergence of Federation of networks
- RED FLAG : Risk of power brokering

If you go down this road

- Configuration will depend on nature of government's interests and preferred structure
- Will be different at state level than federal level
- No formal provincial relationships yet in Canada
- Partnerships are not equally balanced   even when intent is good
- Sector is diverse and differentially resourced
- Sector needs to be linked and have its own mechanisms for feeding into central or state processes